



Employment Policy Statement

Revised 2010

Summary of the Issue:

The vast majority of Oregonians with developmental disabilities are under employed or unemployed despite their demonstrated ability to become valued employees. While the state is once again making employment of individuals with developmental disabilities a high priority, these individuals continue to face significant barriers and challenges in obtaining and maintaining integrated competitive employment.

Position:

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that people with developmental disabilities can and should have the opportunity to work in integrated competitive jobs, earn a livable wage, and enjoy the other benefits that come from having a job. Persons with developmental disabilities are an important and largely untapped employment resource. With the appropriate information, education, training, technology and support, most people can work in their communities. But the quality and quantity of employment options for people with developmental disabilities in Oregon must be improved.

The Council believes that quality employment outcomes for Oregonians with developmental disabilities should include:

- integrated competitive employment,
- a choice of jobs and careers,
- meaningful wages and benefits,
- opportunities to advance in their jobs and careers,
- community inclusion and relationships with coworkers.

To improve the employment outcomes of Oregonians with developmental disabilities, the Council believes:

- the state must remain focused on and committed to advancing integrated, competitive employment;
- employment outcome data should be collected, analyzed, reported and used to make improvements in state funded services;

- a wide array of options and supports must be available to meet the employment needs of individuals;
- public school systems must fulfill their responsibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to develop a coordinated set of activities that facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities including the preparation of students for transition to integrated, competitive employment;
- individuals with developmental disabilities and families need exposure to employment success stories and other assistance to understand that integrated competitive employment is an achievable goal and an expectation for working age adults;
- training and technical assistance must be provided to people who work with individuals to reach their employment goals;
- interagency partnerships, and partnerships between government and the business community, must be strengthened.

Background:

Integrated competitive employment offers people, with and without disabilities, greater access to their communities, a path out of poverty, reduced dependence on publicly funded services, self esteem and a valued social role. Workers with developmental disabilities report satisfaction about having their own money to spend, doing important jobs, being independent, and making new friends.

Oregon was a national leader in supported employment in the late 1980's. With public policy that promoted integrated jobs and a major federal grant, approximately 50% of persons with developmental disabilities moved from segregated to integrated employment. Since then, however, the trend has reversed. Gains in supported employment were lost due to a lack of focus on integrated employment outcomes. State employment outcome data¹ now show that only 6% of individuals in comprehensive services who receive employment supports have integrated community jobs. The remaining 94% are either in segregated employment or choose not to work:

- 42% are in sheltered employment,
- 13% are in group employment,
- 39% are in "alternatives to employment."

In 2005, Oregon's disability community refocused on competitive employment of persons with disabilities. Advocates formed a coalition to promote employment and

¹ Semi-Annual Employment Outcome System Evaluation Report – Sept. 2009
www.oregon.gov/DHS/SPD/data/eos2009report14n2.pdf

urged adoption of policy promoting employment of persons with developmental disabilities. With a multi-year Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVRS) launched the federally-funded Competitive Employment Project (CEP) to address systemic barriers to employment of persons with disabilities. At about the same time, Office of Developmental Disabilities Services joined a national technical assistance employment network, and launched a rate change initiative that may positively effect employment of persons with developmental disabilities.

In 2009, Seniors and People with Disabilities adopted the Employment First policy for persons with developmental disabilities. In addition, SPD's Employed Persons with Disabilities program has more than doubled the number of employed persons with disabilities to whom it is providing Medicaid health care benefits. OVRS/CEP, in partnership with Disability Rights Oregon (DRO) and Oregon's Centers for Independent Living, developed the Work Incentives Network (WIN). WIN and DRO's Work Incentives and Planning Assistance program, provide work incentives and benefits planning to individuals with disabilities seeking to be competitive employed. In addition, OVRS/CEP and similar projects in other states are jointly carrying out a nationwide campaign to educate and engage employers about hiring people with disabilities.

These efforts and the renewed focus on employment are welcome. The path to competitive integrated employment, however, remains difficult for many individuals, sometimes even more so for those living in rural parts of the state. For example:

- Finding jobs that match individuals' skills and interests is challenging. More organizations and individuals with capacity, skills and creativity are needed to help people reach employment goals.
- The availability of other interrelated services and supports – including health care benefits, community housing, transportation, and benefits and work incentives planning – remain limited.
- The rules and policies of federal and state disability programs and policies are complex and can be confusing and conflicting, and may discourage employment.
- Some educators, service professionals, families and individuals with disabilities may not believe that persons with developmental disabilities can engage in competitive employment and so do not explore employment options.

It is essential that the advocacy community continue to monitor the state's progress in improving employment services and supports. Periodic evaluations and recommendations should be made and widely distributed. With the additional, though limited, resources now available through the Support Services Medicaid waiver, a high priority should be

placed on providing quality employment options for the thousands of persons with developmental disabilities who have access to person centered planning and supports.

Possible Future Activities:

- Promote the principles and implementation of the state “Employment First” policy so that “employment opportunities in fully integrated work settings shall be the first and priority option explored in the service planning for working age adults with developmental disabilities.”²
- Advocate for ongoing funding of the Work Incentive Network so that persons with disabilities are informed about how to use work incentives to obtain and continue to work, and not jeopardize essential benefits.
- Advocate for preservation and expansion of the Employed Persons with Disabilities program so that individuals with developmental and other disabilities do not have to choose between being employed and having health care benefits.
- Participate in broad disability coalitions at the national and state level to strengthen developmental disability representation in employment issues.
- Work to increase general public awareness and family knowledge of strategies for quality employment of individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Participate with the developmental disabilities community in advocating for employment through strategic planning and targeted activities with the Developmental Disability Employment Task Force; the State Employment Leadership Network; the Alliance for Full Participation; Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Division and the Restructuring Budgets, Assessments and Rates Program (ReBAR); the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and its Competitive Employment Project; and the State Rehabilitation Council.
- Support legislation identified by the Developmental Disabilities Coalition as important to the employment of persons with developmental and other disabilities.

² Office of Developmental Disability Services State Policy on Employment for Working Age Individuals, September 18, 2008

- Support the interagency efforts of the Oregon Department of Education, the Department of Human Services and the Office of Vocation Rehabilitation Services to initiate post secondary transition discussions earlier in the academic process; to improve high school transition services; and strengthen agency collaborations to achieve better post secondary student outcomes, including career related training and employment.
- Advocate with the Seniors and People with Disabilities Division for improved employment outcomes through employment focused person-centered planning for working age adults, rate restructuring and benefits and work incentives counseling.
- Support training and technical assistance to families, individuals with developmental disabilities, and professionals that will increase the vision, creativity, capacity, and options for real employment. In particular, advocate for a systematic approach to job coach/job developer training so more direct support professionals have the skills to help people find and keep integrated jobs in the community.
- Promote stronger linkages between Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, public schools and developmental disabilities services at the local and state levels.
- Work with other organizations on grants and initiatives that promote employment for individuals with developmental disabilities.